

Message Text

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TAGS: PINR, PINT, FI
SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION REPORT FIVE: PRESIDENT KEKKONEN
WILL GET HUGE MAJORITY IN RELATIVELY LOW VOTER TURNOUT FOR A
FLAWED ELECTION

REF: HELSINKI 0017,

1. SUMMARY: POPULAR VOTING FOR ELECTORAL CANDIDATES TAKES
PLACE JANUARY 15-16 IN FINLAND'S FIRST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
IN TEN YEARS. THE FINAL PRE-ELECTION POLL SHOWS THAT
PRESIDENT KEKKONEN MAINTAINS HIS OVERWHELMING LEAD OVER
HIS FOUR RIVALS AND WILL WIN HANDILY. HOWEVER, THE POLL
AND OTHER INDICATORS POINT TO THE LOWEST VOTER PARTICIPATION
RATE SINCE 1950; WHILE THIS PROSPECT IS DISTURBING TO ALL
PARTIES, IT CAN HARDLY COME AS A SURPRISE. KEKKONEN HAS
TAKEN THE LEAD IN URGING PEOPLE TO VOTE BY DECLARING THAT THE
ELECTION COULD BE REGARDED AS A REFERENDUM ON HIS FOREIGN
POLICY. END SUMMARY.

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2. FINLAND GOES TO THE POLLS JANUARY 15-16 IN ITS
FIRST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SINCE 1968. ELECTORS CHOSEN
IN THIS STAGE WILL VOTE ON FEBRUARY 15 TO ELECT THE
PRESIDENT. ALTHOUGH THE OUTCOME HAS NEVER BEEN IN
DOUBT, AND PRESIDENT URHO KEKKONEN WILL CONTINUE IN
THE OFFICE HE HAS HELD SINCE 1956, THE CAMPAIGN HAS

BEEN CONDUCTED IN EARNEST (REFTEL) AND THE ELECTION PROCESS ITSELF IS SIGNIFICANT. FOREIGN INTEREST IN THE ELECTION IS REFLECTED IN THE FACT THAT REPORTEDLY 50 TO 60 JOURNALISTS FROM ABROAD WILL BE IN FINLAND TO COVER THE ELECTION.

3. THE FINAL PRE-ELECTION GALLUP POLL, TAKEN IN DECEMBER AND PUBLISHED JANUARY 7 BY HELSINGIN SANOMAT, SHOWED LITTLE CHANGE FROM THE PATTERN OF OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR KEKKONEN WHICH HAS PREVAILED FROM THE START OF THE CAMPAIGN: OF THOSE VOTERS WHO HAVE MADE UP THEIR MINDS, 90 PERCENT SUPPORT KEKKONEN AND 10 PERCENT HIS VARIOUS RIVALS. RESULTS OF THE POLL GAVE KEKKONEN 69 PERCENT, WESTERHOLM THREE PERCENT, SALONEN AND VENNAMO TWO PERCENT EACH AND HIKALA ONE PERCENT. NINETEEN PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED WERE STILL LISTED AS UNDECIDED, AND FOUR PERCENT ANNOUNCED THEY HAD DECIDED NOT TO VOTE.

4. PARTICULARLY NOTEWORTHY WAS THE POLL'S PREDICTION THAT VOTER TURNOUT WOULD FALL SHORT OF 65 PERCENT. THIS WOULD BE SIGNIFICANTLY LESS THAN THE 70.2 PERCENT WHO VOTED IN 1968 AND WOULD CONSTITUTE THE LOWEST VOTER PARTICIPATION RATE OF ANY PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SINCE 1950, ALTHOUGH HIGHER THAN IN ANY OF THOSE HELD PRIOR TO 1956. THIS PREDICTION HAS BEEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REINFORCED BY LOWER THAN NORMAL ABSENTEE BALLOTING: WITH OVERSEAS VOTING COMPLETED, ONLY THREE PERCENT OF THE 128,000 ELIGIBLE FINNISH VOTERS IN SWEDEN HAD BOTHERED TO PARTICIPATE, COMPARED TO 25 PERCENT IN THE 1975 FINNISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION, AND FIGURES FOR OTHER COUNTRIES ARE COMPARABLE. DOMESTIC ABSENTEE BALLOTING WAS MORE ENCOURAGING BUT ONLY PICKED UP TOWARD THE END AND FELL FAR SHORT OF THE 1975 RATE.

5. THESE INDICATORS OF VOTER APATHY, WHICH MAY BE MORE SERIOUS THAN EARLIER POLLS SUGGESTED, HAVE PROMPTED STRONG GET-OUT-THE-VOTE APPEALS FROM POLITICIANS AND THE PRESS. PRIME MINISTER SORSA, IN REMARKS SEEN BY SOME OBSERVERS AS A POSSIBLE MELLOWING OF HIS SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S DOCTRINAIRE OPPOSITION TO DIRECT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, STATED THAT THE SYSTEM VESTING EXTENSIVE POWER IN THE HEAD OF STATE IS SERVING FINLAND WELL BUT " THE GREATER THE POWER OF THE PRESIDENT, THE GREATER THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ORDINARY CITIZEN TO VOTE." CONSERVATIVE PARTY SPOKESMEN HAVE STRESSED THE NEED FOR GAINING AS MANY VOTES AS POSSIBLE FOR CONSERVATIVE ELECTORS SO THAT

MORE EMPHASIS WILL BE GIVEN TO THE PARTY'S VIEWS IN POST-ELECTION ECONOMIC DECISIONS. THIS PARTISAN ARGUMENT WAS RESTATED BY COMMUNIST DAILY KANSAN UUTISEN WHICH CAUTIONED WORKERS AGAINST CONCLUDING THE ELECTION IS NOT RELEVANT TO THEIR LIVES AND WARNED THAT THE ELECTION RETURNS "WILL SERVE AS THE BASIS FOR APPRAISING THE STRENGTH OF DIFFERENT POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN DOMESTIC POLITICS." LEADING HELSINGIN SANOMAT SAID IT IS WRONG TO LULL ONESELF INTO THINKING THAT THE FINAL OUTCOME IS SELF-EVIDENT AND THAT NOT ALL VOTES ARE NEEDED.

6. KEKKONEN HIMSELF, OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF POOR VOTER RESPONSE TO AN ELECTION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CAMPAIGN HE HAS BEEN TRYING HIS BEST TO ENLIVEN, MADE HIS OWN CONTROVERSIAL APPEAL FOR VOTES BY COMPARING THE ELECTION TO A REFERENDUM ON HIS FOREIGN POLICY. DEPARTING FROM HIS PREPARED TEXT AT A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ELECTION RALLY IN HELSINKI'S FINLANDIA HALL ON JANUARY 8, KEKKONEN THREW DOWN THE GAUNTLET TO HIS CRITICS BY IN EFFECT STATING THAT VOTERS WILL BE GIVING A VERDICT ON THE NATION'S PRESENT FOREIGN POLICY; HE SAID THAT BY THEIR BALLOTS VOTERS WILL BE INDICATING WHETHER THEY ARE "WILLING TO CONTINUE ON OUR PRESENT OFFICIAL COURSE... OR ENTER ON A DIFFERENT COURSE ON WHICH WE SHALL GAIN NOTHING, AS SHOWN IN THE PAST."

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7. THE FINNISH PRESS HAS GENERALLY ENDORSED KEKKONEN'S CHALLENGE, DESPITE THE FACT THAT IT IS VAGUE AND LOGICALLY FLAWED: THE FACT IS THAT ALL OF THE CANDIDATES HAVE SUPPORTED THE BASIC TENETS OF THE PRESENT FINNISH FOREIGN POLICY AND ONLY ONE (SALONEN) HAS SUGGESTED THAT KEKKONEN HIMSELF IS GUILTY OF DISTORTING THEM; MOST OF THE CRITICISM OF KEKKONEN HAS BEEN CAREFULLY CONFINED TO DOMESTIC ISSUES. HELSINGIN SANOMAT CLAIMED THAT THE "ALTERNATIVES (PRESENTED BY KEKKONEN) ARE NO DOUBT CLEAR AND SHOULD GIVE PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF POLITICAL PERSUASION, STRONG MOTIVATION TO GO TO THE POLLS." SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC DEMARI DECLARED THE ELECTION RESULTS WILL BE USED AS A BASIS FOR MEASURING SUPPORT FOR THE PAASIKIVI-KEKKONEN LINE ("AND CERTAINLY NOT ONLY IN FINLAND") AND URGED THAT THE ELECTIONS BE VIEWED WITH SUFFICIENT SERIOUSNESS. CENTER PARTY SUOMENMAA STATED MORE BLUNTLY THAT REGARDLESS OF THE WEATHER "YOU MUST GO TO THE POLLS," BECAUSE A LOW VOTE WILL GIVE "AN INCORRECT PICTURE OF POPULAR SUPPORT FOR OUR FOREIGN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POLICY AND A CHANCE TO DRAW WRONG CONCLUSIONS IN INTERNATIONAL FORA."

8. WHILE THESE APPEALS MAY BOOST VOTER TURNOUT SOMEWHAT THEY WILL PROBABLY NOT AFFECT THE SHARE OF VOTES GOING TO EACH CANDIDATE. ALTHOUGH THE LARGE BLOC OF UNDECIDED VOTERS COULD PRODUCE A SURPRISE IN THE ACTUAL RETURNS, THE PATTERN INDICATED BY THE POLLS SHOWS LITTLE VOTER INCLINATION TO CROSS PARTY LINES. THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN THE COMBINED OPPOSITION HAS FAILED TO CUT INTO THE SUPPORT KEKKONEN ENJOYS AMONG MEMBERS OF THE PARTIES ENDORSING HIM. ON THE OTHER HAND, KEKKONEN HAS PICKED UP A FEW OF THE PREVIOUSLY UNDECIDED VOTES EVEN AMONG CHRISTIAN LEAGUE MEMBERS, WHO GAVE HIM 24 PERCENT OF THEIR SUPPORT IN THE LAST POLL, COMPARED TO 60 PERCENT FOR THEIR OWN CANDIDATE, WESTERHOLM. SIGNIFICANTLY, NO SINGLE ONE OF THE OPPOSING CANDIDATES HAS EMERGED AS THE LEADING CHALLENGER AROUND WHOM ANY POPULAR PROTEST VOTE COULD COALESCE. RURAL PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE VENNAAMO IN A PRE-ELECTION TV INTER-

VIEW OFFERED TO WITHDRAW HIS CANDIDACY (AFTER THE POPULAR VOTE STAGE) IF A DARK HORSE CAN BE FOUND TO ATTRACT ELECTORAL VOTES AWAY FROM KEKKONEN.

9. AMONG THE PARTIES SUPPORTING KEKKONEN, THE OUTCOME OF THEIR ELECTION COMPETITION IS FAR FROM RESOLVED. THE FINAL GALLUP POLL SHOWED THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS LEADING WITH 26 PERCENT OF THE VOTE PROJECTED FOR THEIR ELECTORS, 22 PERCENT FOR THE CENTER PARTY, 20 PERCENT FOR THE COMMUNISTS, 15 PERCENT FOR THE CONSERVATIVES, FOUR PERCENT FOR THE LIBERALS AND THREE PERCENT FOR THE SWEDISH PEOPLE'S PARTY. SUCH RESULTS, IF ACHIEVED IN THE ACTUAL VOTING, WOULD MEAN THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS WOULD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BE RUNNING SLIGHTLY AHEAD OF THEIR PERFORMANCE (25.2 PERCENT) IN FINLAND'S LAST NATIONWIDE ELECTION (AUTUMN, 1976 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS); THE CENTER PARTY CONSIDERABLY AHEAD OF THEIR 1976 SHOWING (18.8 PERCENT); AND THE COMMUNISTS ALSO SOMEWHAT AHEAD OF 1976 (18.5 PERCENT). RUNNING BEHIND THEIR 1976 SHOWING, ACCORDING TO THE POLL, ARE THE CONSERVATIVES (20.8 PERCENT IN 1976) THE SWEDISH PARTY (4.4 PERCENT) AND THE LIBERALS (4.8 PERCENT).

10. IN THE POLL THE TWO LEFT PARTIES AND THE CENTER PARTY HAD THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGES OF THEIR MEMBERS IN THE KEKKONEN COLUMN (CLOSE TO 90 PERCENT), WHILE THE LIBERALS, SWEDES AND CONSERVATIVES WERE NEAR 60 PERCENT. MOST OF THE VOTERS NOT BACKING KEKKONEN FROM THE SIX PARTIES WERE UNDECIDED (35 PERCENT OF THE SWEDES), WITH SALONEN'S SIX PERCENT OF SWEDISH AND CONSERVATIVE PARTY SUPPORT AND WESTERHOLM'S TEN PERCENT FROM THE CONSERVATIVES THE MAJOR OPPOSITION INROADS. IF THE TWO LEFTIST PARTIES MAINTAIN THEIR COMBINED 46 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, IT WOULD BE THE STRONGEST SHOWING EVER BY THE LEFT IN A FINNISH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. IN 1968 THEY POLLED 34.8 PERCENT AND IN 1962 36.6 PERCENT WHILE THE FOUR MAJOR NON-LEFT PARTIES WERE GETTING 52.5 PERCENT AND 59.9 PERCENT RESPECTIVELY, CONTRASTED WITH THEIR 44 PERCENT IN THE LAST POLL.

11. COMMENT: THE POSSIBILITY OF A LOW VOTER TURNOUT HAS LONG BEEN A SOURCE OF ANXIETY TO KEKKONEN SUPPORTERS, SOME OF WHOM SOUGHT TO ELIMINATE IT AT ONE POINT BY FOREGOING THE ELECTION ENTIRELY. THE DIFFICULTY THAT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IS EXPERIENCING, ACCORDING TO THE POLL, IN MOTIVATING ITS FOLLOWERS TO SUPPORT KEKKONEN WAS ALSO ANTICIPATED BY CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERS AND WAS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THEIR EARLIER WILLINGNESS TO GO ALONG

WITH THE UNSUCCESSFUL INITIATIVE FOR A SPECIAL LAW
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OBVIATING THE ELECTION. THE RELATIVE WEAKNESS OF
CONSERVATIVE SUPPORT FOR KEKKONEN--AND SIMILAR PROBLEMS
ON A SMALLER SCALE IN THE SWEDISH AND LIBERAL PARTIES--
WILL APPARENTLY GIVE THE TWO STRONGLY DISCIPLINED
LEFTIST PARTIES AN IMPRESSIVE SHARE OF THE VOTE FOR
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORS.

12. IN OUR VIEW A VOTER TURNOUT OF AROUND 65 PERCENT WOULD
BE NEITHER ALARMING NOR SURPRISING. A PERCENTAGE IN THAT
NEIGHBORHOOD WOULD NOT COMPARE UNFAVORABLY WITH VOTING
LEVELS IN OTHER DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES (INCLUDING OUR OWN)
AND WOULD NOT BE THAT FAR OUT OF LINE EVEN WITH PAST
FINNISH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE
THAT THE LAST MINUTE APPEALS BY THE PRESIDENT AND
POLITICAL LEADERS URGING VOTERS TO GO TO THE
POLLS WILL SUCCEED IN EDGING THE PARTICIPATION RATE
UPWARD. IF VOTER PARTICIPATION IS BELOW NORMAL, SURELY
THE MAJOR CAUSE IS THAT THERE IS NO MAJOR PARTY OP-
POSITION CANDIDATE. OVER THE YEARS, PRESIDENT KEKKONEN
HAS USED THE FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE TO DISCOURAGE
OPPOSITION TO HIM, EVEN AS IN THIS ELECTION HE
CONTINUES TO INSIST THAT A VOTE FOR SOMEONE OTHER THAN
KEKKONEN IS A VOTE AGAINST FINLAND'S FOREIGN POLICY,
I.E., A VOTE AGAINST MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONS WITH
THE SOVIET UNION. THEREFORE, WE CONSIDER A BIT DIS-
INGENUOUS THE EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN FROM THE
PRESIDENT AND LEADING POLITICIANS CONCERNING A RELATIVELY
LOW VOTER TURNOUT. THIS APPARENT DESIRE TO HAVE THE
BEST OF ALL WORLDS--NO OPPOSITION, AN OVERWHELMING
VICTORY, AND HIGH VOTER TURNOUT--AMOUNTS TO A YEN
FOR RE-ELECTION BY ACCLAMATION. OBVIOUSLY, THE LACK
OF SERIOUS OPPOSITION HAS BEEN A SERIOUS FLAW IN THIS
ELECTION; HOWEVER, AS WE HAVE FREQUENTLY OBSERVED,
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THIS ELECTION IS BETTER THAN NO ELECTION AT ALL--
WHICH WAS A CLOSE THING.

RIDGWAY

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